

RHODE ISLAND STATE GUIDE PLAN

# Policy Overview



Rhode Island State Guide Plan  
Policy Overview  
August 2015

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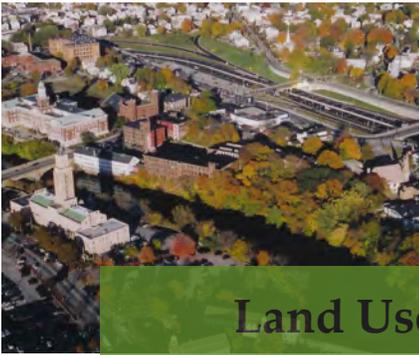
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## INTRODUCTION

The State of Rhode Island began work on developing a State Guide Plan Policy Overview (the Overview) in February 2012. This effort was designed to be a companion piece to the State Guide Plan, both summarizing the consistent themes that tie its various elements together, and pointing out where those themes can be made stronger in the future. For example, Land Use 2025, the land use element of the State Guide Plan, challenges all Rhode Islanders to work collectively to design, build and conserve the State's communities and landscapes over the next twenty years. It is the State Guide Plan element that most fully integrates the enormous range of issues and policy choices represented in the other elements. Together with Transportation 2035, the State's long range transportation plan, and RI Water 2030, the State's water use plan, Land Use 2025 provides a framework for retaining Rhode Island's distinctive landscape, history, traditions and natural beauty, while growing to meet its residents' needs for a thriving economy and vibrant, affordable places to live.

This Overview serves to advance and strengthen the vision provided by the three major plans described above, primarily by adding information from updated elements for Housing and Economic Development. Through this process, the State seeks to strengthen the connection between these five State Guide Plan elements to create a cohesive policy direction that can be successfully implemented and measured over time. This Overview is also intended to explain how each of the State Guide Plan elements works together in an integrated fashion.





## Land Use



## Housing



## Water



## Economic Development



## Transportation

# THE OVERVIEW AND THE STATE GUIDE PLAN

## What is the State Guide Plan?

The State Guide Plan is Rhode Island's centralized and integrated long-range planning document. The State Guide Plan is not a single document but a collection of plans that have been adopted over many years. It comprises many separately published elements covering a range of topics. The State Guide Plan was established by the Rhode Island General Law 42-11-10, which states:

"...the people of this state have a fundamental interest in the orderly development of the state; the state has a positive interest and demonstrated need for establishment of a comprehensive strategic state planning process and the preparation, maintenance, and implementation of plans for the physical, economic, and social, development of the state.... The state guide plan shall be comprised of functional elements or plans dealing with land use; physical development and environmental concerns; economic development; human services; and other factors... The state guide plan shall be a means for centralizing and integrating long-range goals, policies, and plans."

The State Guide Plan provides a degree of continuity and permanent policy direction for the state's future development. The State Planning Council is responsible for approval of the State Guide Plan, which currently contains 25 elements.

## How is the State Guide Plan Used?

The State Guide Plan has four functions. It sets long-range policy (generally 20 years), provides a means to evaluate and coordinate projects or proposals of state importance, including local comprehensive plans, and serves as a general background information source on various topics.

### Plans as State Policy Positions

At its most ambitious, the State Guide Plan establishes broad goals for the state's future and sets proactive policy positions. Individual State Guide Plan elements provide objectives and strategies that advance implementation for these positions. The creation, adoption, and maintenance of State Guide Plan elements provides unique opportunities for all state entities and their constituencies to be involved in setting these policy positions. This process seeks to ensure that issues have been thoroughly researched, options have been evaluated, and policies are consistent with other plans.

### Plans as Tools to Evaluate and Coordinate Projects of State Importance

The State Guide Plan provides a means by which specific projects or proposals are evaluated for consistency with state goals, objectives, and policies. This review function is used in a variety of contexts. Some involve only state agencies while others involve the interaction of federal or local entities with the state. Items that are evaluated for consistency with the State Guide Plan include:

- Direct federal projects within the state
- Proposals requesting federal funds
- Applications for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permits
- Federal Environmental Impact Statements
- Projects of Commerce RI and its subsidiaries
- Projects being reviewed by the Energy Facility Siting Board
- Property leases and conveyances proposed before the State Properties Committee

### Plans as Tools to Assure Consistency of Local Plans

The Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, enacted in 1988 and amended in 2011, requires every Rhode Island city and town to adopt a Comprehensive Plan. Each local Comprehensive Plan is required to be consistent with the State Guide Plan. The State Guide Plan serves both as a guidance document to municipalities as they formulate their individual Comprehensive Plans and subsequently as one of the standards by which the State reviews the local plans.

# Overview

## The State Guide Plan Overview

Laying a policy foundation for the State Guide Plan as a whole, its Land Use element (Land Use 2025) plays a more prominent role than any other element in setting the overarching land use and planning policy framework. Transportation 2035, Water 2030, Rhode Island Rising (the Economic Development Plan) and Rhode Island at Home (the Housing Plan) also play a significant role in setting land use policy for the state.

Together these plans collectively set a course for the entire body of State Guide Plan elements. Lessons learned from this broad policy overview as well as past public engagement efforts will be used to gauge the quality and consistency of future efforts. The five elements will undoubtedly change as updates are made, but the State will continue to plan in an integrated fashion. Regardless of how the elements may evolve, the long-term vision of creating a more sustainable future for Rhode Island is expected to remain intact.



### This Overview focuses on five State Guide Plan elements:

- Land Use 2025
- Rhode Island Rising (Economic Development)
- Rhode Island at Home (Housing, In draft)
- Transportation 2035
- Water 2030

## LAND USE 2025

**Land Use 2025:** State Land Use Policies and Plan is the State’s plan for conservation and development in the 21st century. The central premise of this Plan is that our current rate of land consumption is a major departure from our historic pattern of dense urban centers, and is not sustainable in the long and short term. It reflects the growing realization of the urgency for Rhode Island to plan, develop, and conserve more sustainably as our very small State adjusts to the pace of the dynamic Northeast urbanized corridor and its strategic position between the regional hubs of New York City and Boston. The plan is intended to connect the planning vision and goals “to the ground” in Rhode Island communities, to upgrade the planning capacity of public officials and citizen planners, and to share land use information publicly through the best available technology. The goals of Land Use 2025 include:

# Summary

- 1 A sustainable Rhode Island that is beautiful, diverse, connected, and compact with a distinct quality of place in our urban and rural centers, an abundance of natural resources, and a vibrant sustainable economy.
- 2 A statewide network of green spaces and greenways that protects and preserves the environment, wildlife habitats, natural resources, scenic landscapes, provides recreation, and shapes urban growth.
- 3 Excellence in community design: communities that are high quality, energy efficient, safe, healthful, distinct, diverse, and aesthetically pleasing; communities that are rich in natural, historical, cultural, & recreational resources; communities that provide abundant economic opportunities.
- 4 First class supporting infrastructure that protects the public’s health, safety, and welfare, fosters economic well-being, preserves and enhances environmental quality, and reinforces the distinction between urban and rural areas.
- 5 Implement and maintain the vision. Continue to support public stewardship for land use through strategic public investments in growth centers, land conservation, development, and enhanced planning capacity at the local and regional levels.

# Goals

## RHODE ISLAND RISING (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT)

### Summary

**Rhode Island Rising: A Plan for People, Places, and Prosperity** serves as a framework for economic development policy across all state agencies and provides many tools for local governments to consider. The document is unique to economic development planning in Rhode Island most notably because of its comprehensive nature – addressing issues traditionally found in economic development plans (e.g., job creation, permitting, business climate) as well as many non-traditional issues (e.g., social equity, climate change, education, and housing). In addition to serving as a State Guide Plan Element, it serves to meet a 2013 legislative requirement calling for the adoption of a state-level economic development plan every four years. The document is also used as Rhode Island’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). CEDS is a federal planning process used to develop a five-year economic strategy that is updated annually. The goals provided in the Economic Development Plan include:

### Goals

- 1 Provide educational and training opportunities to activate a 21st century workforce.
- 2 Foster an inclusive economy that targets opportunity to typically underserved populations
- 3 Support industries and investments that play to Rhode Island’s strengths
- 4 Create great places by coordinating economic, housing, and transportation investments.
- 5 Create a stronger and more resilient Rhode Island
- 6 Make Rhode Island a state where our companies, our workers, and the state as a whole can develop a competitive advantage.

## RHODE ISLAND AT HOME (HOUSING, IN DRAFT)

Rhode Island at Home, the draft Housing Plan, was developed as part of the Sustainable Communities Initiative and, like the Economic Development Plan, reflects the depth of community engagement used to create the document. The contents of the draft plan explore the housing needs and preferences of all Rhode Islanders, recognizing the need to produce housing for families and individuals at all income levels. The draft plan is also careful to explore the unique needs of specific populations, recognizing the needs of our homeless and disabled residents and the state's aging population. Other issues central to the document include the need for greater energy efficiency and providing a housing market that is free of discrimination. Draft goals of Rhode Island at Home include:

# Summary

- 1 Activate a land use and regulatory framework that ensures a diversity of housing to meet the needs and preferences of all Rhode Islanders.
- 2 Preserve and create homes affordable to low and moderate income Rhode Islanders particularly in communities with a limited supply of affordable homes.
- 3 Expand access to housing opportunities and reduce discrimination by race, gender and all dimensions of diversity.
- 4 Achieve the goals of Opening Doors Rhode Island by ending chronic and veteran homelessness by 2016 and family homelessness by 2024.
- 5 Ensure all people with disabilities in Rhode Island have the opportunity to lead integrated lives in the community.
- 6 Provide seniors with more housing choices that meet their changing needs and preferences.
- 7 Improve the quality and energy efficiency of our existing housing stock and its resilience to climate change and natural disasters.
- 8 Secure commitment, capacity and funding to implement the strategies of the housing plan.

# Goals

## TRANSPORTATION 2035

# Summary

Transportation 2035 sets direction for state transportation policy and action, and also provides the foundation for other transportation-related plans like the State Airport System Plan, the Freight Plan, the State Rail Plan and others. The plan closely examines the condition and extent of all components of the state's transportation system and compares that information with future needs. Impacts to natural systems and financing mechanisms are also key components of the plan. The plan fulfills federal transportation planning requirements for statewide and metropolitan planning by providing a forum for public input and direction to the Transportation Improvement Program's (TIP) list of funded projects. This plan's goals are structured differently compared with other plans and are generally divided by key components or issues within the system. These goals include:

- B** (Bicycle): Maintain and expand an integrated statewide network of on-road and off-road bicycle routes to provide a safe means of travel for commuting, recreation, and tourism in order to improve public health, and reduce auto congestion and dependency.
- D** (Design): Strive for excellence in design of transportation projects to enhance safety, security, mobility, environmental stewardship, aesthetic quality, and community livability.
- ED** (Economic Development): Support a vigorous economy by facilitating the multi-modal movement of freight and passengers within Rhode Island and the northeast region.
- ER** (Emergency Response): Develop transportation and communication systems that serve Rhode Islanders and the region in the event of natural disasters, accidents, and acts of terrorism in a manner that minimizes injury, loss of life, and disruption to the economy; facilitates evacuation of people; and allows emergency response and recovery activities to occur.
- EN** (Environment): Recognize, protect and enhance the quality of the state's environmental resources and the livability of its communities through well-designed transportation projects and effective operation of the transportation system.

# Goals

# Goals, cont.

- EQ** (Equity): Ensure that the transportation system equitably serves all Rhode Islanders regardless of race, ethnic origin, income, age, mobility impairment, or geographic location.
- F** (Finance): Provide a sustainable financial base for the transportation system that is adequate for supporting needed infrastructure and services with an emphasis on preservation and management of the existing system.
- H** (Highway): Maintain the highway and bridge network in a safe, attractive, and less congested condition to carry passenger vehicles, commercial vehicles, government vehicles, and transit vehicles, as well as bicycles and pedestrians. Recognize roadways as vital public spaces that accommodate travel, commerce, community activities, and utility infrastructure.
- I** (Intermodal): Provide convenient intermodal facilities and services offering seamless connections for passengers and freight.
- LU** (Land Use): Continue to integrate land use and transportation planning using a travel corridor framework and promote responsible development practices in the public and private sectors.
- PE** (Pedestrian): Create and maintain safe and attractive walkable communities to encourage more walking trips, enhance transit usage, improve public health, and reduce auto congestion and dependency.
- PL** (Planning): Conduct a comprehensive, cooperative and continuing planning process that responds to public interests and concerns, strives to meet the needs of underserved communities, and fosters productive relationships with elected and appointed officials from all levels of government and the private sector.
- S** (Safety): Improve the safety of all transportation modes through education, enforcement, and engineering solutions.
- T** (Transit): Provide a safe, robust, and convenient network of transit and shared ride services with seamless intermodal connections in support of increased employment opportunities, improved environmental quality, and reduced congestion and auto dependency.

## RHODE ISLAND WATER 2030

# Summary

Rhode Island Water 2030 consolidated five previous State Guide Plan Elements that examined the availability of, demand for, management and protection of drinking water. The plan also develops a policy framework for the operation and maintenance of water systems to meet or exceed public health and safety standards, sustain growth and development, and improve the overall quality of life in Rhode Island. Goals for the plan are divided into two broad categories: Integrated Management & Planning (IMP) and Water Resource Management (WRM). The goals of the plan include:

### IMP GOALS

- 1 Integrate water resources and supply planning for water systems across intergovernmental and regional jurisdictions.
- 2 Ensure adequate technical, managerial, and financial capacity of water systems.
- 3 Manage and plan for water systems that support sustainable, compact land use and concentrate development within the urban service boundary and or growth centers.

### WRM GOALS

- 1 Manage and plan for the sustainable water use and development of the water resources of the State.
- 2 Protect and preserve the health and ecological functions of the water resources of the State.
- 3 Ensure a reasonable supply of quality drinking water for the State.
- 4 Ensure the protection of public, health, safety and welfare and essential drinking water resources during water supply emergencies.

# Goals

## How the Plans Work Together

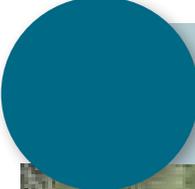
The goals of each individual plan illustrate how the five plans are simultaneously distinct, yet also overlap in ways that support the most important underlying concepts. Descriptions of these planning concepts are provided on the preceding pages along with examples of goals and strategies that intersect across these documents. A full analysis of how all of the Goals (and the subsequent Policies and Strategies) intersect would be too intensive for the purposes of this document. However, it is possible to identify many of these policy intersections under each of the underlying key concepts. Importantly, the strategies provided below are only a sample from the much larger implementation strategies provided in each plan and are provided here to illustrate a larger interwoven policy system.



### Six Cross-Cutting Topics:

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- Urban-Rural Distinction
- Playing to Our Strengths
- Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure
- Equity and Inclusion
- Public Health
- Climate Change



# The Urban-Rural Distinction



Rhode Island’s rural and urban areas are assets to the state on many levels. In our rural areas, scenic and working landscapes connect us to our heritage, but are also a vital component of our economy and integral to the protection of natural resources. Active farmland preserves traditions that are centuries old, but also positions Rhode Island to take advantage of new trends in food production that are already a part of the state’s growing food-based economy. Large tracts of preserved land support habitat and resources that protect our drinking water supplies, preserve watershed hydrology, and provide important recreational opportunities.

Our urban areas are centers for population, job growth, innovation, arts, and cultural diversity. Growth and revitalization in our cities are central to the overall health of the State, and strategic investments in housing, transportation, infrastructure, and economic development are required. From a cultural and economic perspective, many of our greatest assets lie in urban areas including institutions of higher learning, industrial waterfronts, historic neighborhoods, and ethnically diverse populations.

Land Use 2025 is grounded in the idea of “Sustaining the Urban-Rural Distinction.” As part of this approach, the state identified an Urban Services Boundary, which is “based upon a detailed land capability and suitability analysis that demonstrates the capacity of this area to accommodate future growth.” The document calls for the State and municipalities to concentrate growth inside the Urban Services Boundary and within locally designated centers in rural areas, using the local Comprehensive Plan as one of the primary mechanisms for implementation.

Recognizing that growth will continue to occur outside of the Urban Services Boundary, Land Use 2025 goes further to describe “a constellation of centers” in our

more rural communities. These growth areas will support a mix of uses, providing access to a diversity of housing choices, and promoting a high quality of life. Growth Centers are viewed as one of the primary mechanisms for this type of development – coordinating investment in transportation, housing, and job creation in a manner that creates places where residents, workers, business owners, and visitors can have access to a variety of services and amenities.

At the core of strengthening both our urban and rural areas is the idea of “place making”. In both the rural and urban environments, revitalization and new development should strengthen neighborhoods, support “Main Street” commercial areas, and revitalize downtowns, town centers, and villages. As state and local agencies consider the application of incentives or the investment of public dollars in accordance with the strategies provided in this overview, priority should be placed on actions that will create or strengthen Growth Centers. These types of investments will not only yield economic gains, but support the creation of more resilient and healthy communities and opportunities for higher quality of life. Innovative land use tools like Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) and Inclusionary Zoning are examples of how more compact forms of development can also help to address the state’s housing and land preservation goals.

The following goals and strategies (page 14) from the five plans within the Overview illustrate how policies work together to promote this sustainable approach.



### Land Use Goal 1

A sustainable Rhode Island that is beautiful, diverse, connected, and compact with a distinct quality of place in our urban and rural centers, an abundance of natural resources, and a vibrant sustainable economy.

#### Strategy

Prioritize State investments to support growth within the urban services boundary and in State approved growth centers.

### Economic Development Goal 4

Create great places by coordinating economic, housing, and transportation investments.

#### Strategy

Provide technical assistance for the identification and implementation of Growth Centers, including Growth Center visualization techniques.

### Housing Goal 1

Activate a land use and regulatory framework that ensures a diversity of housing to meet the needs and preferences of all Rhode Islanders.

#### Strategy

Develop a suite of development incentives that can be applied to designated Growth Centers.

### Transportation-Goal LU (Land Use)

Continue to integrate land use and transportation planning using a travel corridor framework and promote responsible development practices in the public and private sectors.

#### Strategy

Achieve more concentrated development patterns including infill and mixed use development, and higher residential and employment densities near transit stops. It is desirable to have schools, libraries, parks, and other public services within walking distance of residential areas and town centers.

### Water-Goal IMP-3

Manage and plan for water systems that support sustainable, compact land use and concentrate development within the urban service boundary and or growth centers.

#### Strategy

Locate new growth centers in areas served by or adjacent to public water and /or wastewater systems with available capacity to maximum extent possible.

## Moving Forward with the Urban Rural Distinction

Land Use 2025, Rhode Island Rising, and the draft of Rhode Island At Home all strongly address and reinforce the urban/rural distinction that serves as part of the foundation for the State Guide Plan. While Land Use 2025 puts the policy framework in place, Rhode Island Rising and Rhode Island At Home present very clear, detailed strategies toward achieving that vision. With Water 2030 and Transportation 2035, there are places in these documents where this concept is reinforced, but not to the level achieved by the most recent State Guide Plan elements. As the opportunity arises to revise and update these plans, strategies that dig deeper into the roles played by transportation and water supply relative to growth center development and urban revitalization will help to tie these critical infrastructure issues more closely to this theme. Some of the more challenging questions these plans will continue to explore will include:

- How do we best organize our water utilities to meet the preferred growth patterns and protect water resources?
- Where should transportation funding be focused to re-enforce the policies of Land Use 2025?
- How can planning for transportation and water infrastructure be more seamlessly woven into the Growth Centers program?
- What type of policies and incentives for water conservation are needed to meet future growth demands?





# Playing to Our Strengths

At the core of this Overview is the concept of developing policies and strategies that play to Rhode Island's strengths wherever possible. Some of the unique assets that provide a strategic advantage for our state include:

## *Natural, Historic, and Cultural Assets*

Rhode Island's cultural assets include local arts and design districts, world class historical architecture, its connection to the American Industrial Revolution, a centuries-long maritime tradition, a diverse population and strong sense of community, dense concentration of colleges focused on arts, design, humanities, history, hospitality, and cuisine, a strong and distinctive food culture, and high quality manufacturing and design, among others<sup>1</sup>. Natural assets include state and municipal parks and beaches, forests, farmland, lakes and rivers, and more, all within close proximity to our more urban communities.

## *A History of Manufacturing*

Rhode Island is the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, and the nation's first manufacturing operations shaped many of the urban centers and rural villages we still have today. During the late 20th and early 21st century, Rhode Island suffered enormous losses in manufacturing much like the rest of the country. Today, manufacturing in the U.S. is recreating itself with smaller, cleaner, highly specialized operations. The confluence of Rhode Island's highly skilled design and science sectors, and underutilized manufacturing facilities could position our state for a significant resurgence.

## *Coastline*

With 400 miles of shoreline, Rhode Island has the greatest coastal access per square mile of any other state in the United States<sup>2</sup>. According to a report by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), there are over 20 million beach visits per year in the state and access to a saltwater beach was the most frequently desired outdoor recreational facility of Rhode Island households (70 percent). The report indicated the value of these beach visits at over \$155 million per year. The coastline, however, is also a critical economic asset for marine-based commercial activity, including recreational tourism, boat building, and commercial fishing. The total economic impact of marine-related businesses amounts to \$2.2 billion in sales and \$118 million in local and state fee and tax revenue<sup>3</sup>.

1 Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, Strengthening Rhode Island's Creative and Cultural Economy, 2013

2 Chafee Center for International Business, Bryant University, What's Right About RI.

3 A Fact Sheet on the Importance of Rhode Island Beaches, Marisa Mazzotta, James Latimer, and Mikalai Zhukavets, U.S. EPA, Atlantic Ecology Division, Narragansett, RI, May 14, 2012.

## *Rhode Island's Arts Scene*

Rhode Island is home to the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), one of the most highly acclaimed design schools in the nation. With an entirely different approach, AS220 serves as another arts anchor in Rhode Island by providing an innovative live/work model with sophisticated workshop, performance, and restaurant venues. These icons of the state's arts scene are just two examples of how profoundly integral the arts economy is to Rhode Island's overall economic health and quality of life.

## *Diversity*

Rhode Island is becoming a much more diverse state. While overall population growth has been flat, the population of people of color has increased rapidly in the State: Latino at 44 percent, Asian/Pacific Islander at 28 percent, and Black at 23 percent (from 2000-2010)<sup>4</sup>. By 2040, 40 percent of the state's population will identify as a race other than White. Our diverse population is a strategic economic development and cultural asset and area of opportunity that Rhode Island should seek to tap into so as to improve our regional and global competitiveness.

## *Farms, Food, and Fisheries*

Farms provide numerous economic assets to the state – from actual food production, to land preservation and natural resource protection, to the most recent trend in agritourism. It is estimated that plant-based and agriculture businesses in Rhode Island have a total impact of \$1.78 billion per year and 12,372 jobs<sup>5</sup>. Rhode Island ranks among the states with the highest percentage of food sales direct to the public, amounting to more than \$6 million in sales in 2007 and the highest sales at farmer's markets<sup>6</sup>. Additionally, in 2011, total sales of fish landed by Rhode Island home-ported vessels in the commercial fishing sector totaled \$201 million; 1,506 vessels had commercial landings. An estimated 6,951 Rhode Island jobs are connected directly to harvesting, processing, distributing, and selling fish landed by Rhode Island home-ported vessels.

4 U.S. Census

5 Dr. Thomas W. Sproul and Brandon Elsner, The 2012 Economic Impact Study of Rhode Island Plant-Based Industries and Agriculture, Department of Environmental & Natural Resource Economics, University of Rhode Island, January 16, 2013. Note: In addition to food production, these figures include landscaping-related agriculture (e.g. sod, flowers).

6 Chafee Center for International Business, Bryant University, What's Right About RI.



# Playing to Our Strengths, cont.

## *Ports*

Rhode Island has four major ports – Davisville/Quonset, Port of Providence, Newport, and Galilee – which represent significant opportunities for economic growth. The Port of Davisville is ranked 7th nationally in auto imports. One of only two deep-water ports in New England and one of the busiest in the Northeast, Port of Providence is a crucial regional hub, generating an estimated \$200 million in regional economic impact, more than \$60 million in direct business revenues, and \$16 million in state and local revenue<sup>7</sup>. Newport is a major recreational port with world-class yachting and power-boating facilities and approximately 65 cruise ship visits per year, according to the City’s website. The Port of Galilee in Narragansett is a working fishing village and recreational port with ferry service to Block Island and is one of the largest commercial fishing ports on the US eastern seaboard.

## *Location in the Northeast Corridor*

Rhode Island residents have relatively easy access to both Boston and New York via Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor regional rail service, as well as to Boston via the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). In fact, Rhode Island is one of the few states connected to another state’s regional transit network. In addition to employment, the train provides convenient access to other assets in Boston and New York, such as cultural and historical amenities and institutions, as well as access for people to visit Rhode Island’s natural and cultural assets.

## *Tourism*

Rhode Island’s appeal as a tourist destination is a highly valuable asset for its overall economy. Well known tourist destinations include Newport’s mansions, the Blackstone River Valley, quaint New England villages, and the robust arts, entertainment and dining options in Providence; and there are historic, cultural, and natural resources in every town and city throughout the state. Overall, the economic impact (both direct and indirect) of tourism to the state is significant. A report by IHS Global Insights found that tourism supports over 45,000 jobs (9.6 percent of the state’s job base in 2013), generates \$682 million in state and local tax revenue, and visitors inject \$3.88 billion into the state’s economy (based on 2013 data)<sup>8</sup>.

7 According to the Port’s website, <http://www.provport.com/> last accessed on April 8, 2014.

8 IHS Global Insight, Rhode Island and U.S. Tourism, 2014.



## *Universities and Talent*

Rhode Island has eleven colleges and universities, many of which have solid national and international reputations that draw students from across the country and around the world. To name just a few of the academic assets these institutions offer: Brown University's science, medical, and engineering programs, the Rhode Island School of Design's art and design programs, Bryant University's business programs, and the University of Rhode Island's engineering, pharmacy, and oceanographic research programs, all enjoy high national rankings. Johnson & Wales University's culinary arts and hospitality programs are known worldwide for their excellence and famous alumni.

## *Redevelopment Potential*

Communities across the state are planning strategically for growth and identifying redevelopment areas where future public investments could be made to entice further private investment. Redevelopment will be an incredibly important tool for many of our suburban and urban municipalities, particularly to capture the market opportunities and meet the needs related to housing.

While the State should be prepared to take calculated risks on new markets and solutions that come from outside our borders, building on our strengths should be the primary approach to creating a more prosperous state for all residents. Importantly, the list of assets that can be used to leverage a more sustainable future is diverse and includes landscapes, waterways, industries, workers, universities, and many others.

The following goals and strategies (page 20) provide examples of how each plan within the Overview addresses the broad range of assets and how we can use these to reach a more sustainable future.



## Land Use Goal 2

A statewide network of green spaces and greenways that protects and preserves the environment, wildlife habitats, natural resources, scenic landscapes, provides recreation, and shapes urban growth.

### Strategy

Support agricultural uses and viability; preserve farmland for active agricultural uses.

## Economic Development Goal 3

Support industries and investments that play to Rhode Island's strengths.

### Strategy

Review state policies to reduce/eliminate barriers to increased sales of food that is grown, raised, caught and/or processed in RI to state institutions and state and municipal agencies.

## Housing Goal 1

Activate a land use and regulatory framework that ensures a diversity of housing to meet the needs and preferences of all Rhode Islanders.

### Strategy

Restore the Historic Preservation Investment Tax Credit as a competitive program giving priority to projects that further the state's priorities, including the creation of affordable homes, the revitalization of urban neighborhoods and the promotion of development activity in priority areas within the urban services boundary and in Growth Centers.

## Transportation-Goal ED (Economic Development)

Support a vigorous economy by facilitating the multi-modal movement of freight and passengers within Rhode Island and the northeast region.

### Strategy

Utilize transportation investments to support tourism, one of the state's most important industries. Strengthen linkages between the Providence metropolitan center, air and rail terminals, and tourist attractions in Newport, South County, and the Blackstone Valley.

## Water-Goal WRM-2

Protect and preserve the health and ecological functions of the water resources of the State.

### Strategy

Manage water use and withdrawals based on water availability that considers hydrologic capacity, public health, and protection of aquatic resources.

## Moving Forward with Playing to Our Strengths

As the state looks to revise and update the core State Guide Plan elements, the strengths that are very clearly listed in Rhode Island Rising should be explicitly considered. This plan most effectively addresses the full range of assets within the state and provides a clear list that can be used as a reference for other plans. Land Use 2025 deals effectively with the assets related to land use patterns and frames the discussion around the “rural urban distinction” that is central to the State Guide Plan as a whole. The Transportation and Water plans will have the capacity to address this theme more directly, as they are plans that inherently deal with the support structures that will guide growth and build upon or protect our assets as appropriate. Each of those plans may benefit from the addition of a goal or several objectives that deal directly with the strategic support of Rhode Island’s assets.



# Sustainable & Resilient Infrastructure



Rhode Island's infrastructure demands are more complex and, in many cases, more demanding than in other areas of New England and the US as a whole. In the case of roads and bridges, while Rhode Island shares the maintenance challenges that other states have, our funding structure is different from other states and has proven to be unsustainable from a fiscal perspective. Wastewater and water supply infrastructure in our urban areas also requires continual and sometimes significant investment and our rural areas require innovative solutions for both design and funding to supply the wastewater and water supplies needed for village center development.

Adding to all of these challenges is the pressure to respond to the emerging threats from sea-level rise and the patterns of more frequent and severe storms. With 400 miles of coastline and several major river systems, Rhode Island is forced to address issues related to flooding and coastal hazards with great urgency. The primary causes of infrastructure stress related to climate change include:

## *Precipitation and Storm Severity*

Rain and snow increased one foot total over the last century (0.12 inches per year). This has resulted in a greater risk of flooding, greater stormwater management demands, and the potential for increased pollution in waters from runoff. Recent high-impact storms confirm that hurricane intensity has increased as a result of climate change effects. The immediate impacts are obvious – property damage, beach erosion, flooding, road and bridge damage, and interruption of business<sup>1</sup>.

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1 Rhode Island Ocean Special Area Management Plan, RI Coastal Resources Management Council, October 2010

## *Sea Level Rise*

Since 1930, sea level has increased approximately eight inches in Newport. By 2100, Rhode Island's Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) is anticipating three to five feet of sea level rise. Mapping produced by the State was prepared for the entirety of Rhode Island and inundation maps will prove to be a useful economic policy tool in the years to come. The long-term impacts of sea level rise will undoubtedly change the nature of Rhode Island's coastline and the industries it supports. Some of Rhode Island's greatest economic assets, including our tourist economy and port operations will need to adapt to these changes over time. Other direct impacts of these trends include property loss and diminished public access, including the loss or migration of beaches.

The following goals and sample strategies (page 24) provide an example of how the plans that comprise the Overview address infrastructure issues within a unified policy structure.



## Land Use Goal 2

First class supporting infrastructure that protects the public's health, safety, and welfare, fosters economic well-being, preserves and enhances environmental quality, and reinforces the distinction between urban and rural areas.

### Strategy

State of the art on-site treatment technologies should be employed to facilitate focused growth within centers and other areas designated by community plans for higher

## Economic Development Goal 5

Create a stronger and more resilient Rhode Island.

### Strategy

Create a sustainable, permanent funding mechanism for the repair of Rhode Island's roads and bridges and for the maintenance and expansion of public transportation, freight and rail infrastructure.

## Transportation-Goal PL (Planning)

Conduct a comprehensive, cooperative and continuing planning process that responds to public interests and concerns, strives to meet the needs of underserved communities, and fosters productive relationships with elected and appointed officials from all levels of government and the private sector.

### Strategy

Obtain best available digital elevation data on sea-level rise and assess impact to state and local transportation infrastructure.

## Water-Goal WRM-4

Ensure the protection of public health, safety and welfare and essential drinking water resources during water supply emergencies.

### Strategy

Evaluate intersystem temporary capabilities and needs for supply during emergencies.

## Moving Forward with Sustainable & Resilient Infrastructure

The core plans of the State Guide Plan view the sustainability and resilience of infrastructure primarily through the lenses of funding and hazard mitigation. Transportation 2035 and Water 2030 dedicate more text to these issues simply because the plans are, by nature, infrastructure documents. For example, on the funding side, the Transportation Plan closely examines the complex landscape of transportation funding mechanisms through its “Finance” subsections and the summaries of the various funding sources in the early sections of the plan. The Water Plan also examines many of the funding issues associated with the infrastructure required to provide clean water to hundreds of thousands of residents. During the development of the Economic Development and Housing Plans, some new ideas emerged regarding the financing of transportation and other infrastructure costs. As the opportunity emerges to revise and update the Transportation and Water Plans, the state will want to reference the new ideas in the Economic Development and Housing Plans to see if they are still relevant and, if so, incorporate them.

From the perspective of hazard mitigation and resiliency, Rhode Island Rising and Rhode Island At Home address these issues with the most detailed strategies. The Transportation and Water Plans contain brief discussions related to various resiliency issues and used information and data available at the time these plans were developed. Since the development of these plans, Rhode Island has advanced considerably in developing its knowledge-base, policies, and programs related to resiliency. The Transportation and Water Plans will certainly benefit from these advancements and will likely have significant substantive additions as a result.



# Equity & Inclusion



Equity and access to opportunity are critical underpinnings of the Economic Development and Housing Plans. As preparation for the development of these plans, the State commissioned An Equity Profile of Rhode Island (2013). This report used demographic analysis to illustrate important trends within Rhode Island and discuss the implications of these trends on state-level policy. The report found that communities of color are the driving force in Rhode Island's population growth and essential to the state's economic success now and into the future. Despite the state's many economic strengths, wide racial gaps in income, education, health, and opportunity coupled with a shrinking middle class place the state's economic future at risk.

These significant trends suggest that increasing access to opportunity across the region is necessary for Rhode Island to reach its full economic potential. The implications of these demographic shifts have a varying, but often significant, effect on land use, transportation, housing, and infrastructure policy. Each of the plans reflects this policy priority with examples provided in the following table (page 28).

Specifically:

- Population growth slowed dramatically in the last decade. All of the state's recent population growth is from communities of color.
- Rhode Island has a growing representation from all major racial/ethnic groups, with the share of people of color increasing from seven percent to 24 percent between 1980-2010.
- All of Rhode Island is becoming more diverse, particularly the State's largest cities. By 2040, the state as a whole will be 41 percent people of color.
- The state experiences an above average and growing racial generation gap between the senior and youth populations, as the share of young people of color quickly increases and older populations tend to be white.



## Economic Development Goal 2

Foster and inclusive economy that targets opportunity to typically underserved populations.

### Strategy

Identify and scale solutions for employing those with barriers to employment.

## Housing Goal 3

Housing in Rhode Island will be free of disparities along race, gender and other dimensions of diversity.

### Strategy

Develop a Fair Housing Center where people can get answers to questions about landlord/tenant law, rights and responsibilities, legal assistance, etc.

## Transportation-Goal EQ (Equity)

Ensure that the transportation system equitably serves all Rhode Islanders regardless of race, ethnic origin, income, age, mobility impairment, or geographic location.

### Strategy

Amend CMAQ criteria to award more points to projects improving air quality in areas close to freeways and encourage RIDEM to prioritize urban areas in their school bus diesel retrofit program.



## Moving Forward with Equity & Inclusion

Addressing issues of social equity represents the most recent innovation in planning for the State of Rhode Island. These issues are addressed most directly in the Economic and Housing Plans, as there was an explicitly established goal for doing so through the Sustainable Communities initiative. These two documents present a far more direct and sophisticated policy direction for addressing equity issues with considerable analysis, explicit goals, and numerous strategies. The term “equity” is mentioned in both the Transportation and the Water Plans, but not in Land Use 2025. The Transportation Plan is the only other plan that attempts to address social equity issues, which is consistent with the framework provided in many federal transportation programs. Coupled with discussions of “environmental justice”, the transportation focus tends to look more at protecting disadvantaged populations from bearing the impacts of transportation investments disproportionately.

Overall, reviewing the three earlier core plans, it will be important for forthcoming updates to establish a common understanding of what the term social equity means, and how it affects each individual plan. This discussion requires an investment from all parties involved and the state should begin these discussions well in advance of beginning an update to any State Guide Plan elements. Once a shared understanding of the term is established, the state and those engaged in the planning process will be better equipped to consider:

- What information do we need to be able to weave social equity issues into all of our plans?
- Who will benefit from different policies and strategies and to what degree?
- Are there current policies in place that can create unintended consequences for different groups in the state?

These questions and others will add richness and depth to the three earlier core plans, and will enable the State Guide Plan to better serve all Rhode Islanders.

# Public Health



Until recently, issues related to public health were largely viewed as distinct from the policy debates in land use, transportation, housing, and economic development. The Environmental Justice community often made the connection between egregious health issues like toxic exposure and land use. But these incidents were viewed more as isolated problems from bad actors, and were largely seen as a problem for law enforcement rather than policy development. Over the past couple of decades, as public health issues increased in severity and visibility, this paradigm has shifted. The pervasive increase in obesity rates, heart disease, hypertension and similar conditions (see sidebar ) has caused professionals from many different disciplines to examine their policy frameworks to see where adjustments could make a positive impact on health outcomes.

In the State Guide Plan core plans, the growing awareness of the link between public health and more traditional land use topics is evident. The quality of home environments, walkable and bikeable neighborhoods, heat reduction, active public spaces, and access to healthy foods are examples of policy focus areas that are growing in response to the recent overall decline in public health.

Examples of where these plans specifically target public health related outcomes are provided (page 32).

## Rhode Island Health Statistics

Between 1990 and 2013, the rate of adult obesity in RI nearly tripled, going from 10.1% to 27.3%. Complications from these trends are forecast as follows (<http://stateofobesity.org/states/ri/>):

| Condition              | Recorded Cases (2010) | Projected Cases (2030) |
|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Diabetes               | 82,811                | 138,930                |
| Heart Disease          | 64,087                | 301,251                |
| Obesity-Related Cancer | 17,094                | 43,619                 |



## Land Use Goal 2

A statewide network of greenspaces and greenways that protects and preserves the environment, wildlife habitats, natural resources, scenic landscapes, provides recreation, and shapes urban growth.

### Strategy

Strengthen and expand community-based opportunities for open space and outdoor recreation, particularly in urban areas.

## Economic Development Goal 6

Make Rhode Island a state where our companies, our workers, and the state as a whole can develop a competitive advantage.

### Strategy

Develop strategies and resources to reduce the prevalence and economic impact of preventable chronic disease, and improve the health of the State population to create a healthier workforce.

## Housing Goal 7

All residents will live in safe and healthy homes and neighborhoods that are energy efficient and resilient to climate change and natural hazards.

### Strategy

Support the Rhode Island Alliance for Healthy Homes.

## Transportation-Goal PE (Pedestrian)

Create and maintain safe and attractive walkable communities to encourage more walking trips, enhance transit usage, improve public health, and reduce auto congestion and dependency.

### Strategy

Cooperate with public health and education agencies to develop and disseminate information encouraging the public to walk more for transportation and recreation. Information to be provided should include: maps and signs showing the best walking routes to major destinations; traffic safety education...for school-aged children, and information directed at parents on specific traffic risks children are subject to and steps to increase their safety.

## Water-Goal WRM-1

Manage and plan for the sustainable water use and development of the water resources of the State.

### Strategy

Assure that water systems meet Safe Drinking Water Act standards.

## Moving Forward with Public Health

Moving forward with the theme of public health is particularly challenging as each of the core plans naturally highlights different aspects of public health. With Water 2030, the quality of drinking water is the primary health related concern of the plan. With Transportation 2035, issues related to air quality and mobility represent the public health focus. With Housing, the quality of living conditions as they relate to asthma, food deserts, and lead exposure tie that plan to public health issues. Because of the diverse manner in which each of these plans touches upon public health, it may not be viable to organize a uniform policy approach across all plans. However, this does not preclude, in any way, explicit discussion of how public health ties into each plan and specific strategies.

From an administrative perspective, there is tremendous opportunity to increase the way in which the Rhode Island Department of Health (DOH), Statewide Planning, and RIDOT work together toward achieving overlapping objectives. For example, in recent years RIDOT has used considerable resources to expand the network of bike trails and “in-street networks” in several areas of the state with implementation in rural, suburban, and urban environments. DOH recently piloted the “Healthy Places by Design” initiative in three Rhode Island communities, making a strong link between land use policy and public health impacts. Further, DOH and RIDOT have a strong commitment to tracking performance in their programs and collecting data that will be useful to land use programs moving forward.



# Climate Change



The issue of “Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure” described above deals directly with important aspects of climate change, namely the challenge of investing large sums in infrastructure that may be at risk from hazards associated with changing weather patterns. Climate change, as a planning issue, is much larger than just infrastructure and raises a wide range of questions that touch upon each of the core plans. Some examples include:

## **Land Use:**

- What land use strategies and site design techniques will help Rhode Islanders adapt to climate change?
- How can local governments integrate climate change issues into local land use policies?

## **Economic Development:**

- What are the economic impacts to job centers located in hazard prone areas?
- What are the economic opportunities that will emerge in Rhode Island due to changing weather patterns and sea-level rise?

## **Housing:**

- How will climate change affect the energy cost burden experienced by Rhode Island renters and home owners?
- Will natural hazards force the displacement of neighborhoods in riparian flood zones?

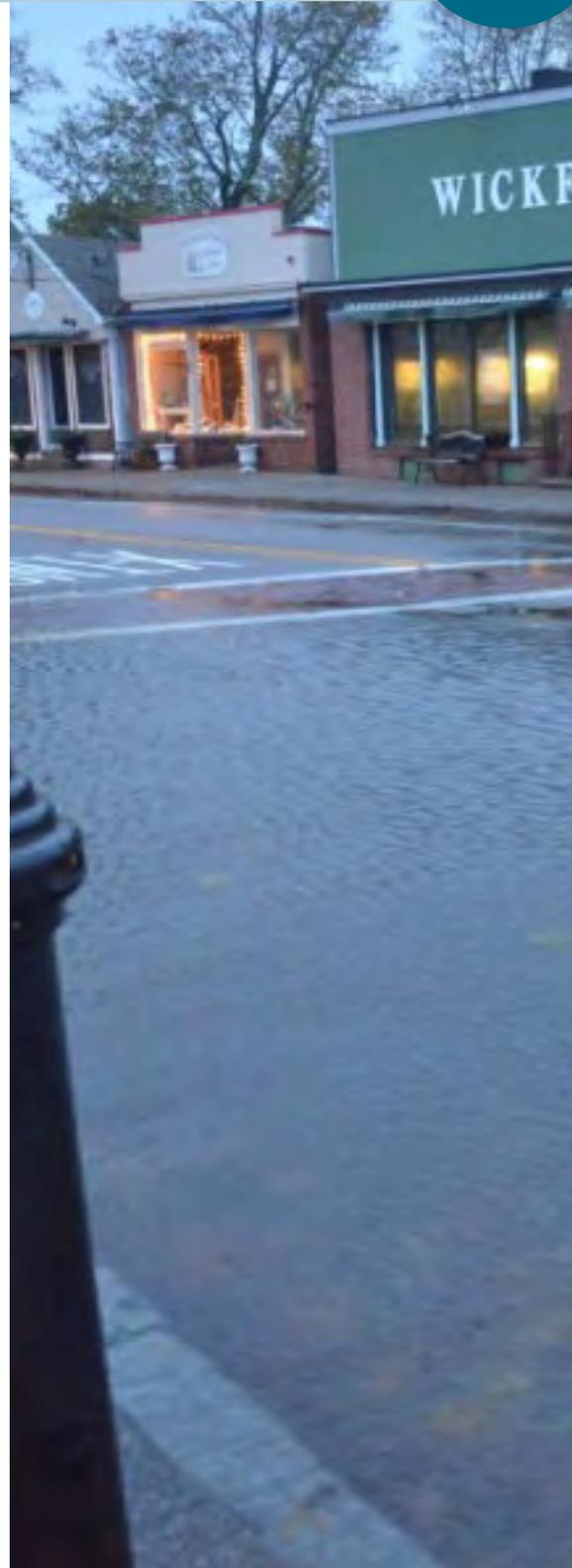
### Transportation:

- Will climate change affect demand for different transportation modes?
- How might transportation funding priorities at the federal level change in response to climate change initiatives?

### Water:

- How will changes in rainfall patterns affect water availability in Rhode Island?
- What water conservation techniques should be considered as part of climate adaptation?

These questions, and many others, have already begun to shape the State Guide Plan core elements. The following goals and sample strategies are examples of where several of these documents have started to address climate change in greater detail (page 36).



## Economic Development Goal 5

Create a stronger and more resilient Rhode Island.

### Strategy

Align academic research around issues of resiliency in order to provide State and local governments with the best climate adaptation and mitigation tools.

## Housing Goal 7

All residents will live in safe and healthy homes and neighborhoods that are energy efficient and resilient to climate change and natural hazards.

### Strategy

Integrate climate change and sea-level rise analyses into local comprehensive planning with an emphasis on the most vulnerable residential areas in a municipality.

## Transportation-Goal EN (Environment)

Recognize, protect and enhance the quality of the state's environmental resources and the livability of its communities through well designed transportation projects and effective operation of the transportation system.

### Strategy

Continue to add alternative fuel technology vehicles to the state and local vehicle fleets while promoting diesel retrofitting of older vehicles. Encourage greater use of hybrid electric / gasoline vehicles that do not require special fueling stations. Continue to replace or upgrade older transit vehicles with clean fuel vehicles. Implementation of school bus diesel retrofits should begin in urban school districts where children are exposed to higher levels of air pollution.

## Water-Goal WRM-1

Manage and plan for the sustainable water use and development of the water resources of the State.

### Strategy

Assess state wide water resources and water systems vulnerability and needs for adaption / mitigation to climate change.

## Moving Forward with Climate Change

The pace of knowledge and policy development related to climate change has been, and will continue to be, extremely fast. The plans that comprise the Overview illustrate this from a historical perspective. The oldest plan, Land Use 2025, does have policies that address climate change. However, these policies do not lead to the development of any concrete strategies within the plan. With Water 2030 and Transportation 2035, issues related to climate change are addressed more explicitly and a number of strategies are provided that illustrate the complexity of the issue. With Rhode Island Rising and Rhode Island at Home, issues related to climate change have a much sharper focus and the policy framework strongly reflects that focus.

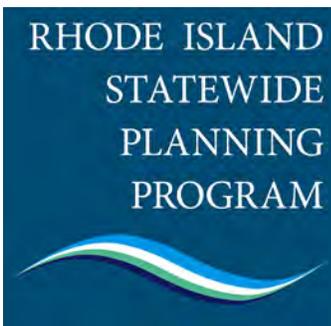
This progression of policy development over time is indicative of how much work has been done with climate change issues in Rhode Island over the last 10 years. Perhaps more than any of the focus areas identified in this overview, constant research and knowledge sharing across a broad constituency will be required to achieve successful revisions to State Guide Plan elements. This will include a very rigorous review of state programs, recent scientific literature, university programs, and international case studies to ensure that the diversity of programs in Rhode Island and beyond are coordinated in a manner that is state-of-the-art. Revisions to the three earlier plans, Land Use 2025 in particular, will have an enormous amount of information and programs to draw from related to climate change. When updating those documents, the State will have the opportunity to incorporate a much more comprehensive set of detailed strategies that reinforce and build upon a large body of work that is still growing quickly.



## CONCLUSION

The five core plans examined in this overview collectively set a course for the entire body of State Guide Plan Elements. Lessons learned from this broad policy overview as well as past public engagement efforts will be used to gauge the quality and consistency of future efforts. The five elements will undoubtedly change as updates are made, but the State will continue to plan in an integrated fashion. Regardless of how the elements may evolve, the long-term vision of creating a more sustainable future for Rhode Island will remain intact.

To achieve this more integrated approach, the State should consider organizing stakeholder/working groups around several of these issues. Public Health, Social Equity, and Climate Change could represent priority areas because of their inherent complexity, the lack of depth in these areas within the State Guide Plan, and the potential to pull together so many state and local partners.



Rhode Island State Guide Plan  
Policy Overview  
August 2015

